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ABSTRACT

A career development model attempts to capture the complexity of Mexican American women's life experiences within a culture driven by Western values toward work, family, and education. The model suggests that the career development process of Mexican American women is different than that of men and of White non-Mexican American women and that Mexican American women deal with particular issues when making career choices. Values, social issues, and culture are components of the career development model. As Mexican American women consider their values, they may question how a career choice will affect or change their value system. Social issues either create or hinder career opportunities for Mexican American women. These issues relate to class, educational level, discrimination, and employment participation. Career decisions become complex for Mexican American women when the element of culture is added to the process. Language, family structure and obligations, traditional sex roles, and religious factors are important elements of culture that impact career decisions. The complexity of the career choice process is demonstrated through a case scenario. Career choices interact reciprocally with values, attitudes, and self-efficacy. Career counseling considerations are offered to help counselors work more effectively with clients who are struggling to maintain their values, cultural obligations, and self-efficacy while confronting social issues and barriers. (Contains 45 references and a flow-charted depiction of the career development model.) (CDS)

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RUNNING HEAD: A Career Development Model for Mexican-American Women

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A Career Development Model for Mexican-American Women

To some extent career development theories have ignored cultural differences (Krumboltz, 1995) and career development research has focused on white males. It is important to note that some career experts suggest that the career development process for women is considerably different from that of men (Osipow & Littlejohn, 1995; Fassinger, 1990; Farmer, 1985; Astin, 1984) with women dealing with issues related to gender role expectations, racism, sexism, and self-efficacy (Fouad, 1995). In addition, "women's career development is unique because of the intertwining of work and family" (Fitzgerald, Fassinger, & Betz, 1995, p. 68).

In this article, a career decision-making model is presented that highlights the complexity and unique nature of the career choice process for Mexican-American women. The article begins with the case scenario of Maria; provides a brief overview of the current status of career-development theories; describes a career-development model and career choice process for Mexican-American women; and suggests career counseling considerations for those counselors who may work with Mexican-American women.

The term Mexican-American is defined as an American-born individual of Mexican ancestry. Due to the lack of research specific to Mexican-American women, cited material includes research specific to Hispanic women and Chicanas. The term Hispanic describes people whose origin is from Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Cuba, including countries in Central and South America (Tienda & Ortiz, 1986). Segura and Pierce (1993) defined Chicano as follows: "During the Chicano movement in the 1960's, the label Chicano arose as the symbolic representation of self-determination, conveying a commitment to political struggle for the betterment of the Mexican-American community" (p. 63).

Case Scenario

Maria is a 30-year-old Mexican-American woman who has been raised with the traditional Mexican culture and values. She is married to a Mexican-American male and they have two children. Maria knows how the family is struggling to make ends meet, but her husband has not yet been willing to permit her to work. In talking to some friends, Maria is

offered a job as a clerical staff person. The office is willing to train her on the job. Maria questions her possibilities for success based on her experiences as a woman of color: "Can I do everything that will be expected of me? Will I be able to speak clearly at meetings or with people who come into the office? Will I have the right clothes to wear? How will the administrators treat me? Will they treat me differently because I'm Mexican-American?"

Maria values the family living in harmony, and she's aware that taking a job will disrupt this harmony. Maria contemplates her career opportunity based on her values as a Mexican-American woman: "If I do this, what will happen to me? What will happen to my family? How will my family treat me? Will my husband let me do this?" For these and many other questions, Maria does not have the answers.

Eventually, Maria decides that she is ready to take on this new challenge and is willing to deal with any obstacles that lie ahead. She now has to deal with telling the family. She decides to first speak to her mother who will tactfully relay the information to her father.

Maria: Mother, I've been offered a job, what do you think? Should I take it? (Maria waits for her mother's reaction.)

Mother: Daughter, why do you want to work hard? Just stay at home where you belong--where you're comfortable. You already know what's expected of you. Why do you want to learn a job? Besides, it's going to require you to work late hours and you need to be at home with your husband and children. Why don't you and the family move in with us? If it was up to me, daughter, I would not do it. What does Miguel say about this? You have to do what he tells you. You don't want to cause problems.

Maria: Mother, I am going to take this job because it will help the family.

Mother: Shaking her head, mother mumbles, "Que Dios te bendiga mi hija." [English translation, "May God bless you my daughter." However, she is not in agreement or supportive of her daughter's actions.]

Maria now has to approach her husband knowing that this will be more difficult because traditional roles prohibit her from working outside the home. She also remembers that her father-

in-law told them, "The woman's place is in the home and when the woman starts to earn more money than the husband, then the woman begins to wear the pants in the house." She tells her husband about the job. He is very quiet at first but finally speaks.

Miguel: Are you sure you want to do this? You know it's not right for you to work. What will my friends and family say? If you do take this job, how much money will you be making?

Maria: Yes, I want to work and help pay the bills. You can tell your friends and family that it's only temporary. As far as the salary, I don't know, but it's not very much.

Maria felt guilty because she knew that she would be making more money than her husband, but she also knew that if she told him the truth, he would never approve. She does not want to reduce her husband's "macho" role. In order to make her decision more acceptable to Miguel, Maria promises that if she is not able to keep up with her daily house chores and the job, she will quit the job. She also reminds him that her mother will take care of the children. Reluctantly, he gives her permission and reminds her that she must always be there for him.

This scenario demonstrates the internal struggle that occurs as a Mexican-American woman decides whether or not to take a job. She evaluates the issues regarding her minority status within society and possible outcomes affecting her and her family. For Maria, taking the job would involve modifying her cultural values and familial obligations and being willing to confront societal issues related to gender and ethnicity. This decision-making process becomes a turning point in Maria's life, resulting in a greater sense of self-efficacy and a foundation for making future career choices.

Current Status of Career Development Theories

Women of color have similar experiences to white women; however, their experiences are different because of the element of culture. The major career development theories ignore cultural differences (Krumboltz, 1995), and a comprehensive career-development model has not been developed to address the needs of a culturally-different population (Arbona, 1996; Hackett & Byars, 1996; Leong & Brown, 1995; Osipow & Littlejohn, 1995). A recent study of career

development models, based on the work of Leong and Brown (1995), specifies that "the central problem with most, if not all, of the majority career theories is their lack of cultural validity for racial and ethnic minorities in this country" (p. 145).

There has been, however, some professional discourse on career development barriers, implications of self-concept, vocational identity, and career decision and indecision of women based on the general cultural norms of African American, Southeast Asian, and Hispanic cultures (Chalungsooth, 1990; Gainor & Forrest, 1991; Hackett & Byars, 1996; Pruitt, 1993; Yang, 1991). Even less attention has been given to career development processes related specifically to more defined groups within these generalized categories.

A Career Development Model for Mexican-American Women

The accompanying model (Figure 1) proposes to help fill the gap between deficient theories and existing career development models which are based on the needs of white males or broad ethnic minority populations. The theoretical base for this model considers the specific issues for Mexican-American women in making career decisions and implications for career counselors in facilitating these decisions.

The conceptual framework of this model is grounded in several important points. First, there are specific issues related to the career development of Mexican-American women in general. For example, family issues continue to influence women's career decisions. Deciding to have children as well as responsibility for domestic chores creates delays and obstacles toward reaching career objectives. Second, the model is client-specific. Career counselors need to recognize the client as an individual first and then consider subcultural differences. Third, self-efficacy plays a major role in this career development model. The model suggests a continuous, internal, transitional process that takes place as Mexican-American women make career choices.

Bingham and Ward (1994) noted that the world of work, family involvement, community influence, language, socialization, sexism and racism all influence the career development of ethnic minority women. They specifically note that "these categories cannot be neatly divided, and they overlap and perhaps are not even separable" (p. 168). The model suggests that these

categories may be grouped into three areas: values, social issues, and culture. These three areas or elements are the foundational components of the model and the career choice process depicted in the model is essentially an internal evaluation and transitional process which takes into consideration the foundational components of values, social issues, and culture.

Values

Super (1995) defined values as "a set of general beliefs, opinions, and attitudes about what is preferable, right, or simply good in life" (p. 54). He further suggested that values change as changes occur in labor, and as educational and promotional opportunities become available. Values vary across cultures (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1995), and they guide or inform the decision making process of Hispanic women (Blea, 1992). Research on values has suggested that Hispanic people believe in a) living in harmony, b) emphasizing the present, c) "being" rather than "doing," and d) identifying individual goals as subordinate to group goals (Fouad, 1995). As the Mexican-American woman considers her values, she may question how a career choice will affect or change her value system. For example, she may ask, "Will I have different needs and interests as I grow and gain new knowledge in my new career? Will these different needs conflict with my culture? Will I become less dependent on my husband which compromises traditional sex-roles?" Career counselors need to be aware of specific Hispanic values and how cultural aspects impact the career decision process (Fouad, 1995).

Culture-general and culture-specific information is important for counselors; however, Betz and Fitzgerald (1995) warn against making the assumption that values of a certain group apply to all within that group. Individual's cultural values differ depending on the level of acculturation and assimilation, socioeconomic status, and family history (Fouad, 1993). One can conclude from this that value systems do not remain constant but change as a result of life experiences, social issues, and generational (acculturation or assimilation) status.

Social Issues

Social issues, another foundational component of the model, either create or hinder career opportunities for Mexican-American women. Issues such as class, educational level,

discrimination, and employment participation have been, and continue to be, of particular importance since the annexation of northern Mexico into the United States, when Mexican-Americans were considered second-class citizens (Segura & Pierce, 1993). Chicana women held even lower status than the men when they entered the U.S. (Baca Zinn, 1975) and they have been described as "ideally submissive, unworldly, and chaste," or, "at the command of the husband... ignorant of life" (Sosa Riddell, 1974, p. 402).

Barriers which evolve out of social issues impact career opportunities of Mexican-American women. Social barriers such as sex roles, negative societal messages, and low self-esteem contribute to a lower social class standing as well as to a lower educational level (Vasquez, 1982). Young (1992) suggested that the educational experiences of Mexican-American women are formed by the intersection of gender and ethnicity. The interaction between educational experiences, gender, and ethnicity could create a struggle or "role strain" which occurs when a person tries to meet the compelling expectations and obligations of two roles simultaneously (Kitchener, 1988). First-generation Chicanas experience role strain. They experience a struggle as they attempt to meet both family and school obligations (Vasquez, 1982). They maintain a lower educational level, and as a result, their participation in the U.S. workforce is also affected (Blea, 1992). For example, the participation of Hispanic women in the work force, which would include Mexican-American women, is 54.4%, whereas the participation of white women is 57.2% (Segura, 1992). Reasons for lower participation among Mexican-American women are higher fertility, lower educational levels, and discrimination based on race. Racial characteristics impact the career development process as seen when lighter skinned Mexican-Americans experience less discrimination than darker skinned Mexican-Americans (Arbona, 1995). Hispanic women's status is unique because these factors prevent them from fully participating in the labor force and this differentiates them from non-Hispanics (Ortiz & Cooney, 1982). In summary, social issues, while significant to the career development of all women, exert a special influence on Mexican-American women.

Culture

Culture is another foundational element of this model. Career decisions become even more complex for Mexican-American women when the element of culture is added to the process. Moore (1985) maintains that culture is an important element in understanding the Hispanic person and that it is difficult to define Hispanic culture because of the many subcultures encompassed within that label. Culture is seen as a variable that influences participation in education, the labor force, marriage and politics (Blea, 1992). In addition, the Mexican-American woman is responsible for maintaining and transmitting culture to others within the family structure (Segura & Pierce, 1993; Rodriguez, 1994). Elements such as language, family structure, sex-roles and religion make up culture and impact the career decision processes of Mexican-American women.

Language plays an important part within the Hispanic culture, and women "are characterized by a culture rooted in the Spanish language" (Blea, 1992, p. xii). Blea further stated that without the language, culture is more vulnerable to change. As the language diminishes, so does the culture because language is the basis of cultural practices and traditions (Johnson, Swartz, & Martin, 1995). Maintaining the language is important for the survival of the culture, but it can also create barriers for the Hispanic woman's participation in the labor force (Cresce, 1992).

The family structure is another important element of culture. Chicano familism includes family size, multigenerational households, family unity, support, and interaction with the extended family (Baca Zinn, 1982/83). The Hispanic family structure has traditionally been grounded with a dominant father figure (Montiel, 1973) and the mother, holding a passive role, is dependent upon this male figure (Fouad, 1995). The Mexican-American woman must not only deal with sex-role stereotypes within society but also with male domination within her own culture (Rodriguez, 1994).

Adherence to traditional sex roles becomes another issue in the career development process. Traditional sex roles are found to be more prevalent in first- and second-generation

Hispanic women (Ortiz & Cooney, 1982). Mexican-American women are less likely to participate in the labor force, partly because of their maternal responsibility; and as mothers they are also responsible for maintaining the family structure and for teaching their daughters traditional cultural practices (Segura & Pierce, 1993; Rodriguez, 1994).

Religious factors also greatly influence the career decisions made by Mexican-American women. More than half of the Hispanic Catholic population is comprised of women, and their role is to maintain the religion (Diaz-Stevens, 1994). The ideology of "Marianisma" (the veneration of the Virgin Mary) has, in part, formed the Mexican-American woman's identity as a saintly and passive person, an identity in which "oppression is an obligation" (Nieto-Gomez, 1976, p. 226). Some examples of this saintliness are maintaining modesty and maternal and self-sacrificing aspects (Rodriguez, 1994). Such aspects, as well as the Catholic Church's position on issues regarding abortion, birth control, and divorce, create barriers to the Chicanas' career development (Blea, 1992). For example, a woman enters a career and decides to hold off plans on having children but taking birth control is not acceptable by the Catholic Church.

The Mexican-American culture is complicated and is more complex for its women. The Mexican-American woman is expected to maintain the culture and assure that it is transmitted to future generations. The internal evaluation process takes into consideration cultural aspects which the Mexican-American woman is expected to maintain. In making career choices a Mexican-American woman may ask questions such as, "How will taking a job affect the relationship with my husband and family? Will the fact that I may earn more income than my husband be socially acceptable within the community and, most important, will it be acceptable to my husband and family? With higher levels of responsibility, will I be required to attend functions in a leadership position? Can I be an effective leader? Will my husband be willing to stand by me in my new role?" In addition, she may wonder if her accent will suggest that she is unable to communicate effectively in English and/or create problems of miscommunication. It is likely that working longer hours will create the need for additional child-care services, and this could create an internal struggle between mothering and providing what is best for the family.

In summary, each element is part of the internal evaluation process which impacts the career choices made by Mexican-American women. Values guide the decision-making process, and social issues such as status, education, and employment influence those values. Culture also impacts the Mexican-American woman's values and her participation in education and in the labor force.

Career Choice Process

The internal evaluation process depicts a struggle to maintain basic values as the Mexican-American woman makes decisions which will bring personal growth and development. As noted by Schlossberg, Troll, & Leibowitz (1978) "...there are times when decisions may be contradictory because to choose one path is to reject another" (p.34). As the Mexican-American woman goes through her internal evaluation process she comes to realize that her career choices will affect values, social issues, and culture. It is a reciprocal process. As career choices are made and as the Mexican-American woman gains more knowledge, her values, social issues and cultural obligations may change. For example, the Mexican-American woman may value the family living in harmony and may also be aware that taking a job will disrupt this harmony. In deciding to take a job, the family experiences less harmony, but survives the change. As a result, her value of living in harmony has been modified because of her career choice. Furthermore, the next time a career choice has to be made, she will recognize that living in harmony is important and that the family survived the previous experience.

The career choice process (i.e., taking a job or getting promoted) could involve transitions or "turning points." Such changes may require modifying traditional roles (Schlossberg, et al., 1978). In the model being presented, the process of making career choices may ultimately increase self-efficacy, as Mexican-American women go through an internal evaluation process as they make career choices. The model also suggests that there is a transitional process because career choices and success may increase the level of self-efficacy.

Self-Efficacy

The model suggests that the Mexican-American woman's self-efficacy plays a role during and after the decision-making process. According to Hackett & Betz (1981) self-efficacy is also important to the career development process. The stronger sense a woman has of her ability to succeed, the greater chance there is to succeed. In a study conducted by Lent & Hackett (1987), self-efficacy expectations were identified as important variables in the career development of women and self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986) offers support as a relevant framework for further understanding the career development processes in women (Betz & Hackett, 1986; Osipow & LittleJohn, 1995), in this case, Mexican-American women.

According to Bandura (1977) behavior and behavior change are mediated primarily by expectations of personal self-efficacy. Personal self-efficacy is defined as beliefs about one's own ability to successfully perform a given behavior (Bandura, 1977). Personal self-efficacy expectations are defined in two dimensions: efficacy expectations and outcome expectations. Efficacy expectations determine whether or not behavior will be initiated, how much effort will be expended, and how long the behavior will be sustained, regardless of obstacles and adverse experiences (Betz & Hackett, 1986). "Successful performance of a given behavior is probably the most powerful source of strong self-efficacy expectations" (Hackett & Betz, 1981, p.328). Outcome expectations refer to beliefs that certain results will follow particular behaviors. For example, a Mexican-American woman may ask herself, "If I do this, what will happen?" It has been suggested by Lent, Brown, & Hackett (1994) that the power of self-efficacy in predicting behavior is likely moderated by outcome expectations. This distinction is especially important in the vocational behavior of women, for whom self-efficacy may not translate into behavior if the behavior is not expected to be rewarded or if the opportunities to implement behavior are seen as limited due to internal and external barriers (Farmer, 1976; Fitzgerald, Fassinger, & Betz, 1995). These internal and external barriers for Mexican-American women include issues such as fear of success, gender role orientation, risk-taking behavior, home-career conflict, low academic self-esteem, discrimination, family socialization, and lack of support systems (Farmer, 1976).

Bingham and Ward (1994) extend these barriers to understanding the career decision-making and adjustment processes of women of color through the deliberate incorporation of culture and its related values.

In this model, self-efficacy is part of the career-choice process and is improved through various transitional stages which are interdependent to the three foundational components: values, social issues, and culture. Efficacy expectations will determine whether or not a career choice will be made and outcome expectations refers to the belief that certain results will follow. For example, a Mexican-American woman who is offered a job questions whether she can do the job. "Can I do this?" She is also not sure of the outcome expectations. "If I do this, what will happen to me; what will happen to my family?" She values the family living in harmony and is aware that taking a job will disrupt this harmony. She decides to take a job acknowledging the obstacles and adverse experiences. In taking the job, the Mexican-American woman experiences success. Even though the family experienced less harmony, they survived the change, and her value of living in harmony has changed. The next time a career choice has to be made, she will make her choice with an improved level of self-efficacy, yet recognizing that even though living in harmony is important, the family will survive. In addition, she now has a greater sense of succeeding because she was successful and endured the results that followed.

In summary, this model suggests that the career development process of Mexican-American women is different than that of men and of white non-Mexican-American women. It also suggests that within the Hispanic culture there are subcultural differences that impact Mexican-American women which are different from other groups of people identified as Hispanic. This model takes into consideration the foundational components of culture and the unique needs which are based on values, cultural obligations, and the social barriers (i.e., racism and language) Mexican-American women encounter along the career development process. For example, career decisions are rooted in basic values, and values are influenced by social issues and culture; social issues create or hinder the career opportunities for Mexican-American women; and culture influences Mexican-American women's values and their participation in

education, labor, and the economy. In addition, the model identifies the important role self-efficacy has in the career choice process.

Career Counseling Considerations

The complexity of the career choice process has been presented through the case scenario of Maria and the discussion of the model. The following career counseling considerations are presented to help counselors work more effectively with clients like Maria who are struggling to maintain their values, cultural obligations, and self-efficacy while confronting social issues and barriers.

1. Career counselors must have a general understanding of the Mexican-American culture and remember to consider the client as an individual. In addition, it is important to consider the important role family will play in the decision-making process.
2. Career counselors need to recognize that the career development needs of women are different than those of men. However, the experiences of women of color are more complex because of cultural differences and their experiences with social barriers such as racism and sexism, in this case Mexican-American women.
3. Career counselors need to recognize the three foundational components—values, social issues, and culture–from the perspective of Mexican-American women. These three components are critical pieces of the internal evaluation process that occurs for Mexican-American women in the career choice process. The career choice process involves questions related to values, social issues, and culture. The following are types of questions that Mexican-American women may ask themselves as they struggle through the career-choice process:

   Questions related to Values: Will I have different needs and interests as I grow and gain new knowledge in this position? Will these needs conflict with my culture? Will I become less dependent on my husband which compromises traditional sex roles?

Questions related to Social Issues: Will society perceive me even more differently in my new role and will peers question how I advanced? Will peers consider me an equal or will traditional stereotypes impede equal treatment ? Do I have adequate education and intelligence to succeed in such a position? How will this change affect my social status?

Questions related to Culture: How will taking a job affect the relationship with my husband and family? Will the fact that I may earn more income than my husband be socially acceptable to the community and, most important, to my husband and family? With higher levels of responsibility, will I be required to attend functions in a leadership position? Can I be an effective leader? Will my husband be willing to stand by me in my new role? Will my accent be perceived as my inability to communicate effectively in English, or will it create problems of miscommunication? Will working longer hours create the need for additional child-care services? How will I be able to handle the struggle between mothering and providing what is best for the family and a commitment to my new job?

4. Career counselors need to recognize that the career choice process can be more complex than they assume. It is likely to be a painful process as well; to accept one path is to reject or modify another path which may go against traditional beliefs.

5. Career counselors need to recognize the role of self-efficacy from the perspective of Mexican-American women. Self-efficacy may have different meanings based on a person's culture. Greater self-efficacy may be attained once there is a comfortable and acceptable fit among the components of values, social issues, and culture. Greater self-efficacy may also be attained through career-related successes.

Summary

Career development theories are fragmented and a comprehensive career development model addressing cultural differences has not been developed to meet the specific needs of Mexican-American women. This article has introduced a career development model which

attempts to capture the complexity of the Mexican-American woman's life experiences within a dominant culture driven by western values toward work, family, and education. The article also addresses the issues Mexican-American women deal with in making career choices.

This model is a beginning and it is our hope that the issues discussed will prompt further research that validates the process that Mexican-American women go through in making career decisions. Research could include the validation between two groups--Mexican-American women and white non Mexican-American women to identify similarities and dissimilarities in the career decision making process. Tools to accomplish this type of research could include inventories to measure the impact of values, culture, and social issues on career choice processes and self-efficacy inventories to identify the relationships between self-efficacy and the career-choice process for Mexican-American women. Also, in-depth, one-on-one interviews or focus groups could be conducted to validate the experiences of Mexican-American women in the career development process and to compare those experiences to the model.

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Figure Caption

Figure 1. A Career Development Model for Mexican-American Women. The model provides career counselors with an additional tool from which they can gain a greater insight on the complexity of the career development process Mexican-American women experience.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT MODEL FOR MEXICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN

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